

# PONTIUS PILATE'S REPORT OF THE CRUCIFIXION.

The Ancient Manuscript, Just Published in London, and Printed in the Journal Last Sunday, Has Aroused the Intensest Interest of the Entire Christian World.

THE report of Pontius Pilate to Tiberius Caesar, which the Sunday Journal published last Sunday, has aroused widespread discussion both here and in England. The document, which purports to be a translation of Pilate's original report, was given to the Journal by John Kensit, of No. 18 Paternoster Row, London, one of the oldest and best known publishers of religious works in England. The proof sheets of the volume were given to the Journal in advance, and the book is now on sale in London.

The title page of this extremely interesting volume reads:

AN ANCIENT AND INTERESTING DOCUMENT  
Found in the Vatican, at Rome, which purports to be  
THE ORIGINAL REPORT OF  
PILATE, ROMAN GOVERNOR OF JUDEA,  
to the  
EMPEROR TIBERIUS CAESAR,  
Explanatory of the  
CAUSES WHICH LED TO THE TUMULT IN JERUSALEM.  
in connection with  
THE DEATH OF JESUS OF NAZARETH.

Mr. Kensit, the publisher, in a statement to the Journal, says:

"I purchased the translation of the Report of Pilate from the Rev. Dr. Mahan, and did not undertake to make an examination of his documents and evidences of authenticity. The Journal was supplied with advance sheets of the book, which now is on sale and has attracted wide attention. I am informed by theologians of repute that the document bears marks of genuineness."

The Rev. Dr. Mahan, the translator, in a message to the Journal says:

"The report of Pilate which is now being published in London has been through the mills of scholastic criticism and has emerged unharmed. It is destined to stand side by side with the New Testament."

As the Journal pointed out last Sunday, it is impossible to establish the positive authenticity of the document until expert paleographers have studied the ancient Latin manuscript, which is now in the archives of the Vatican library, at Rome. The Journal has, however, collected the opinions of the best scholars and biblical students on the probability of genuineness, as indicated by the internal evidences of the report as presented by the English publisher.

Wherever the Journal has sought for expressions of opinion from experts on Bible literature, it has found the intensest interest in this remarkable document. The Rev. A. C. McGiffert, Ph. D., D. D., professor of Church History in the Union Theological Seminary, was so deeply impressed with Pilate's report that he brought last Sunday's Journal into the class room and made it the subject of his Monday morning lecture. In fact, Professor McGiffert read line by line every word of the article, and commented on its superficial and internal evidences for and against its authenticity.

## Rev. Dr. McGiffert, Professor of Church History, Takes the Article in Last Sunday's Journal as the Subject for His Lecture at Union Theological Seminary.

ON LAST Monday morning, when the class in church history was called together at Union Theological Seminary, Professor McGiffert met it with a copy of the supplement to the Sunday Journal in his hand. He had seen the announcement of the report of Pontius Pilate and had purchased a copy on Sunday. The class was called to order, and the scholarly professor, full of all that German scholarship could give him (for he is a graduate of Göttingen), began a learned lecture on what is generally known as the "Pilate literature." This alone was striking, but taken in connection with the publication of the report of Pilate in the Journal of the day before, it was startling. And when the professor unfolded the broad sheet of the Sunday Journal the students were on tiptoe with expectation. Word by word, paragraph by paragraph, column by column, the professor read on to the listening students, stopping now and then to make some learned comment, but not ceasing until he had read the whole remarkable story from beginning to end.

It is proper to state here that Professor Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Ph. D., D. D., is the Washburn Professor of Church History in the Union Theological Seminary of New York, one of the greatest educational institutions founded by the Presbyterian Church. He has just published a learned and valuable "History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age," and in 1890 published a translation of Eusebius's Church History in the "Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," edited by Dr. Philip Schaff, D. D., LL. D., and Henry Wace, D. D.

In Book II, chapter 2, of Dr. McGiffert's translation of Eusebius this paragraph appears:

"And when the wonderful resurrection and ascension of our Saviour were already noised abroad, in accordance with an ancient custom, which prevailed among the rulers of the provinces, of reporting to the Emperor the novel occurrences which took place in them, in order that nothing might escape him, Pontius Pilate informed Tiberius of the reports which were noised abroad through all Palestine concerning the resurrection of our Saviour Jesus from the dead."

To this Dr. McGiffert adds a note:

"That Pilate made an official report to Tiberius is stated also by Tertullian, and is in itself quite probable. Justin Martyr mentions certain acts of Pilate as well known in his day, but the so-called Acts of Pilate which are still extant in various forms are spurious, and belong to a much later period. They are very fanciful and curious."

The passage was pointed out to the Journal representative by Dr. McGiffert as giving former conceptions on this subject. When he spoke to his students last Monday morning the professor touched upon the old Apocryphal documents in this strain:

By Right Rev. J. Havens Richards, S. J., President of Georgetown University.

The authenticity of the document published by the Journal can not be intelligently discussed unless the critic is a recognized antiquarian, has at hand the original MSS., has a perfect knowledge of the circumstances attending its discovery, and, above all, a clear idea of the intellectual attainments of the translator. I am, therefore, loath to give an opinion, as I know nothing of this discovery except what I have learned from the Journal.

I incline to the belief that the Journal document is a translation, made probably by some learned monk in the middle ages from some earlier copy of Pilate's report, or what was believed traditionally to be Pilate's report.

It is an exceedingly interesting subject, and certainly a most ennobling theme, independently of the historical merits of the case. Its discussion in the press cannot fail to exert a good influence on all readers.

From Rev. Dr. Mahan, Who Translated the Manuscript.

To the Editor of the Journal:

The Report of Pilate which is now being published in London has been through the mills of scholastic criticism and has emerged unharmed. It is destined to stand side by side with the New Testament.

W D Mahan

By the Publisher of the Book.

To the Editor of the Journal:

I purchased the translation of the report of Pilate from the Rev. Dr. Mahan and did not undertake to make an examination of his documents and evidences of authenticity. The Journal was supplied with advance sheets of the book which now is on sale and has attracted wide attention. I am informed by theologians of repute that the document bears marks of genuineness.

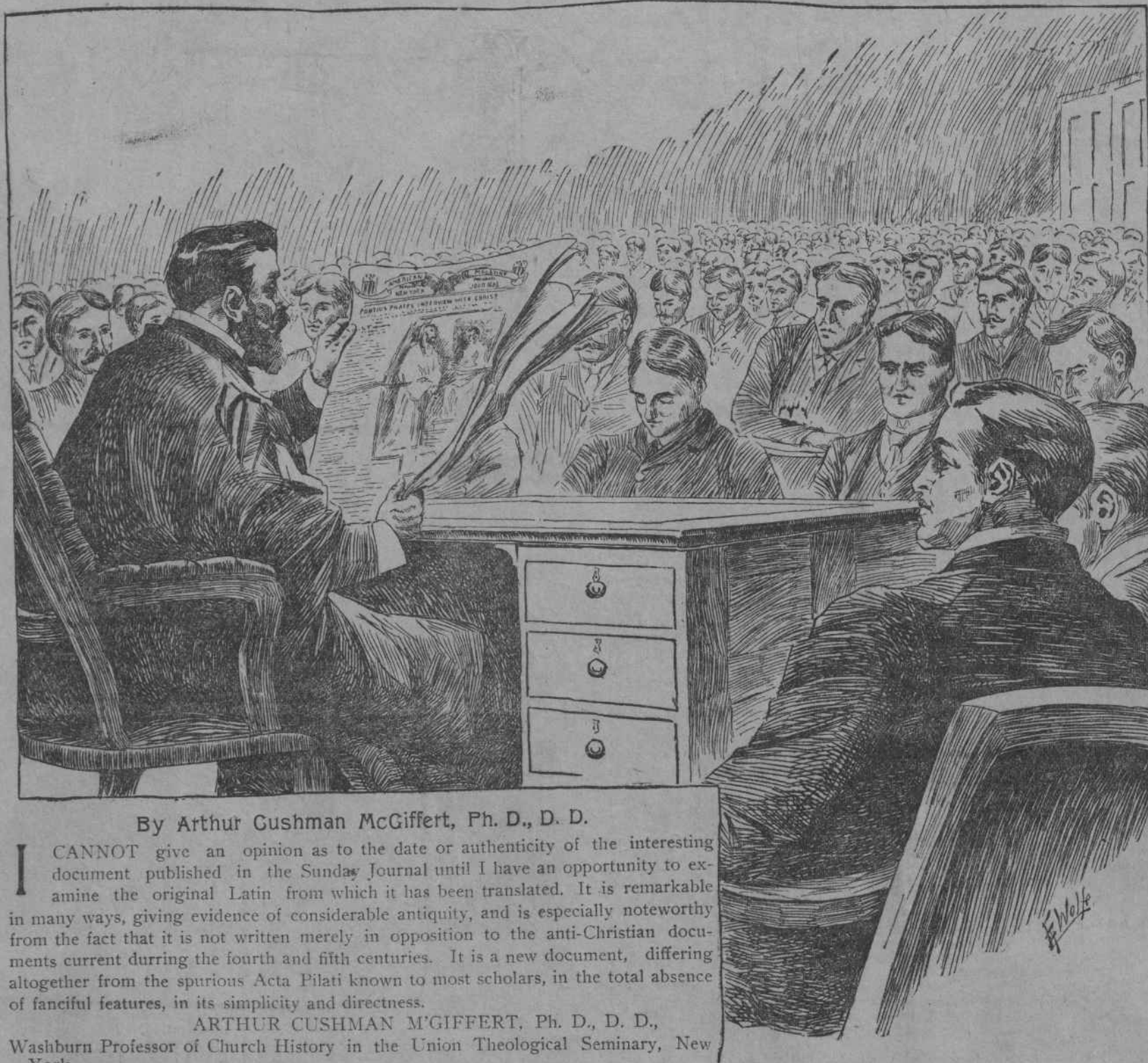
JOHN KENSIT.

By Rev. Dr. Talmage.

I cannot discuss the merits of the Journal story from the standpoint of scholarship. Obviously to do this intelligently I would have to see the original manuscripts and examine all the circumstances attending their discovery.

But I am glad to say here publicly that I rejoice in the publication, from the standpoint of a preacher of the Gospel and a follower of Jesus. I honor the Journal for its work. I desire to be named among the champions of the Journalism which gives its columns for such noble discussions. This story, no matter what its historical or theological worth, has reached ten million readers that would otherwise never have given even a passing thought to the martyrdom of the Redeemer of the world. It has accomplished the same end for which we preach sermons, write tracts, edit religious papers.

Again, I say, I honor its work. For twenty-eight years I have labored to have the secular papers treat religious themes in their news columns. I rejoice to see that my work is bearing good fruit. Such an article as the Journal gave to the public on Sunday last proves to me that at last the secular press is trending in the right direction. I say most heartily, let the good work go on.



By Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Ph. D., D. D.

I CANNOT give an opinion as to the date or authenticity of the interesting document published in the Sunday Journal until I have an opportunity to examine the original Latin from which it has been translated. It is remarkable in many ways, giving evidence of considerable antiquity, and is especially noteworthy from the fact that it is not written merely in opposition to the anti-Christian documents current during the fourth and fifth centuries. It is a new document, differing altogether from the spurious Acta Pilati known to most scholars, in the total absence of fanciful features, in its simplicity and directness.

ARTHUR CUSHMAN M'GIFERT, Ph. D., D. D.,  
Washburn Professor of Church History in the Union Theological Seminary, New York.

By President Whitman, of Columbian University.

Of late several prominent newspapers have made a specialty of offering to their readers documents or other statements on religious truths usually not easily accessible to the multitude. If the question of the legitimacy of this had not been raised, one could hardly conceive of its being raised. The fact that the function of the daily newspaper is to give the news of the world as developed from day to day in its news columns and an interpretation of that news in the editorial columns, would seem to make the daily papers a very proper medium for presenting truth to the world.

The fact that it has been found worth while for the secular press to print matter of pre-eminent interest to scholars, whereas the bulk of the readers of such a paper would hardly be counted in the ranks of scholarship, is really a very wholesome indication. It marks interest on the part of the multitude in matters of spiritual concern. It indicates an openness of mind toward everything that touches the foundations of the faith. It betokens, too, a growing mental grasp on the part of the great mass of readers. It would be a wholesome thing if demands might be made upon the daily papers for larger and larger space to be devoted to such themes.

By Daniel Quinn, of the Catholic University, One of the Most Eminent Scholars in America.

I have read the Journal story with the greatest interest. I have no hesitation in saying that I consider its publication of the utmost importance, from the standpoint of scholarship. No matter whether it prove to be the original, a copy of the original, or simply an ancient document detailing the traditional contents of Pilate's report, it is worthy of serious attention from men of culture, and I am happy to predict that so it will be considered.

In the third and fourth centuries two copies of the original letter to Tiberius Caesar concerning the death of Christ was spoken of as extant. It is traditional that other copies were made, both of the original and of these two copies of which I speak. Since the Journal's publication I have heard and read several criticisms alleging that this letter was couched in mediaeval Latin. We can tell absolutely nothing from this. All the faults that appear in the translation may be the faults of the translator, and not of the original. I am not prepared to say that an original exists, but I believe that an original has existed.

Pilate, under the Roman Emperor, held a position very similar to that of our consuls. It is only reasonable to believe, even without documentary evidence, that he would write an account of such a momentous occurrence.

I am rather surprised at the onslaught of adverse criticism hurled at the Journal. To say, as some have of those critics, that the Vatican library has no more treasures to yield, is scarcely true. Discoveries of wonderful importance are frequent occurrences. Last year Professor Hale, of the Chicago University, brought to light the poems of Catullus, and, indeed, the work of research in the Vatican is only in its infancy.

Only experts can discover its treasures, because the old MSS. frequently bear the title of one author, whereas they may contain treatises and extracts from a dozen. So I am not so incredulous regarding the Journal story, as one of our American scholars. I believe that much good will result from the publication, and that it is in every way praiseworthy.

By Rev. Dr. Frederic Z. Rooker, Secretary of the Apostolic Delegation at Washington.

I was quite surprised to see in one of the New York papers an attack on Mgr. Martinelli's interview on the Pilate story of the Journal. Had the writer of the article read carefully the Delegate's utterance he would have perceived that he had no cause for criticism.

The Delegate said to the Journal correspondent that he had no official knowledge of such a discovery—that is, the Vatican organs have not announced it—and therefore he could not discuss the subject authoritatively. From the standpoint of a scholar he gave a brief history of the traditions and known writings of the early Church fathers, while he related that such a report was sent to Tiberius Caesar from the Roman Governor of Judea. To verify the rumor that the MSS. of this long lost report has been discovered, to substantiate the claims that the Journal document is a correct English translation of this ancient document, is a discussion altogether too complicated for even a brief consideration.

But should the claims of its authenticity be established, it is most assuredly a great discovery, and should claim attention from every scholar and divine in the Christian world. Its appearance in the Journal is a good omen for the elevation of the daily press to a high plane of religion and culture.

"In the early portion of the fourth century the Emperor Maximian was at the head of the Roman Empire. He is generally known as the 'Persecuting Emperor' on account of his savage persecution of his subjects, especially those who were not Romans. It was at this time that much of the 'Pilate literature' known to scholars was composed. The enemies of the Christians forged all sorts of documents purporting to be Pilate's report, accusing Jesus of all kinds of immoralities, making most ridiculous charges against Him and His followers. To counteract the effect of these documents the Christians wrote other 'reports of Pilate' going to the other extreme. The mass of this literature is very great, the best known being the 'Gospel of Nicodemus,' which Dr. Tischendorf thinks is very ancient—but few other scholars agree with him. The Latin in which most of these are written belongs to the early Middle Ages."

And here Dr. McGiffert took up the Sunday Journal and opened it to the story of "Pilate's Interview with Christ," and said:

"Here, however, is a remarkable new document, the original of which is said to be in the Vatican Library. It differs from all of the other 'Acta Pilati' in its simplicity and directness and the absence of all special pleading. It does not seem to have been written to meet any of the anti-Christian 'reports,' but appears to be a statement of the facts as the writer knew them. It can hardly be the original report of Pilate, for I do not think that a Roman Governor would write this to the Emperor: 'An insatiable thirst for conquest—to extend our empire beyond the means of defending it—fear will be the means of overthrowing our noble Government.' (Quoting from page 18 of the Sunday Journal). This must have been introduced by a writer who saw the Roman Empire on the point of dissolution."

"There are, however, other marks which point to the conclusion that this is not the original report. Notice this sentence: 'So dreadful were the signs that were seen, both in the heavens and on the earth, that Dionysius, the Areopagite, is reported to have exclaimed,' etc."

"Now, I have no doubt that what follows is a quotation from the writings of Dionysius. It is true that Dionysius, the Areopagite, is mentioned by Paul in the Book of Acts, but scholars have agreed that the writings now known as those of Dionysius, the Areopagite, are not earlier than the fifth or sixth century. This would lead me to suppose that the document of which this is a translation cannot well be earlier than the fifth century. But I should like very much to see the original Latin, for then it would be comparatively simple to fix the date of its composition. This translation is, nevertheless, very interesting and well worthy of careful study."

By Rev. Thomas J. Shahan, D. D., Doctor of Ecclesiastical History in the Catholic University.

It is true that a document such as this purports to be has always been supposed to exist. Tertullian, the Apologist, speaks of it very authoritatively. He was a lawyer, and in his discussions with the pagan jurists cites them to this letter of Pilate, which he said existed in the Imperial archives at his time, the early part of the third century. St. John Chrysostom and St. Justin Martyr also allude to it. In the time of Constantine, Eusebius was given permission to examine all the records of the Empire.

He alludes to such a document, but as he did not publish it, there is great probability that it had disappeared. Arguing from this fact, many scholars have disputed the existence of such a letter; but Tischendorf, the discoverer of the Sinaitic Codex, asserts with a great deal of vigor that such a letter was written, and has lent a great deal of credibility to the legend. The late Dr. Lippsius also believed that such a letter was in existence.